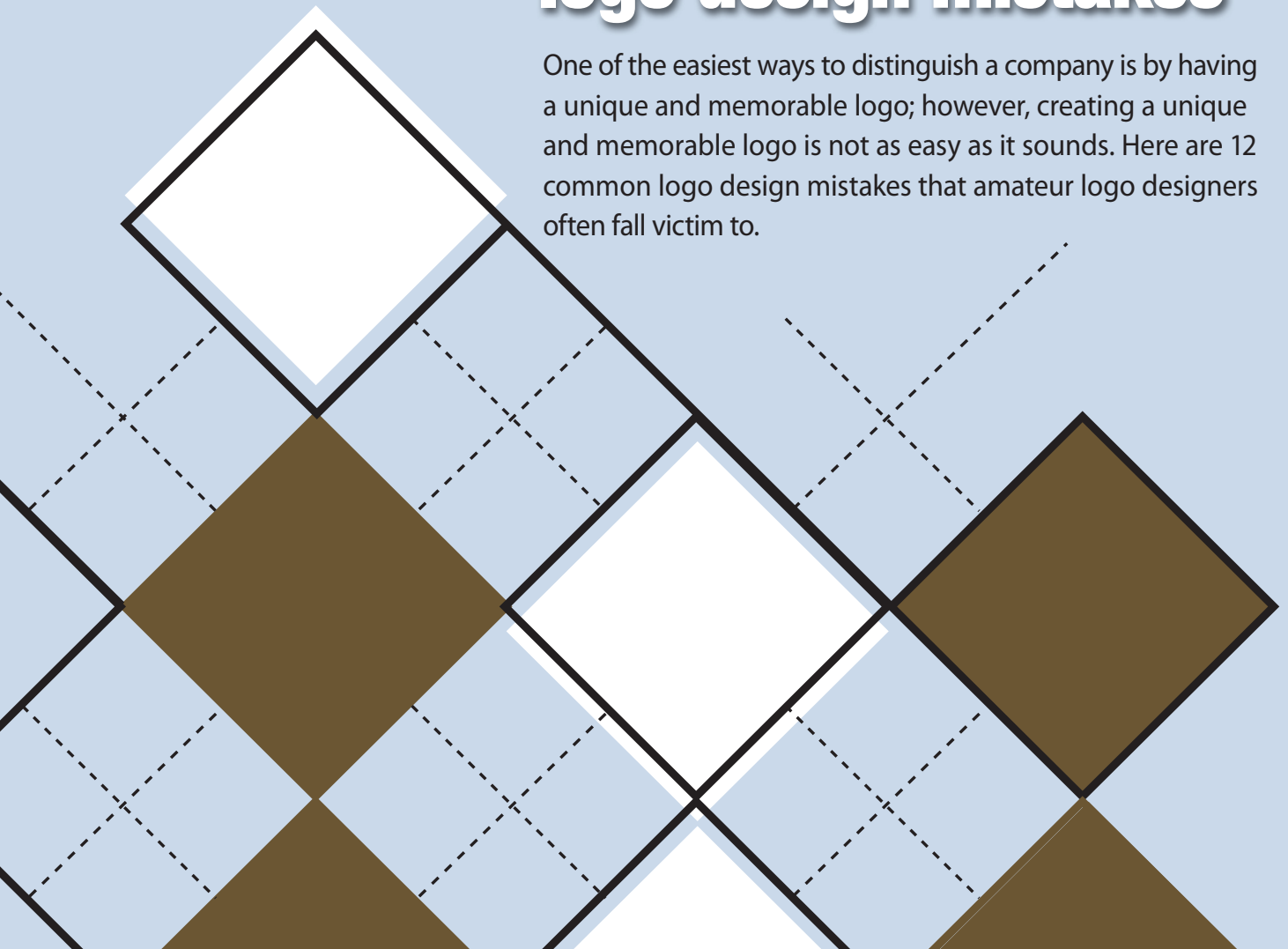




By Jacob Cass

How to avoid common logo design mistakes

One of the easiest ways to distinguish a company is by having a unique and memorable logo; however, creating a unique and memorable logo is not as easy as it sounds. Here are 12 common logo design mistakes that amateur logo designers often fall victim to.



Typographic Chaos

Typography in logo design can make or break a design, so it's vital you know your typographic ABCs. A logo should be kept as simple as possible while still portraying the intended message, and for this to happen, one must consider all typographic aspects of the design.

Don't use too many fonts or weights (two maximum). Don't use predictable, crazy, or ultrathin fonts. Pay close attention to kerning, spacing, and sizing and most importantly, ensure you've chosen the right font(s) for the project at hand.

Poor font choice

As touched on above, when it comes to creating a logo, choosing the right font can make or break a design. Font choice can often take as long as the creation of the logo mark itself and it should not be done briskly.

Spend time researching all the various fonts that could be used for the project, narrow them down further, and then see how each one gels with the logo mark. Don't be afraid to purchase a font, modify one, or create your own. Also, keep in mind how the logo's font could be used across the rest of the brand identity in conjunction with other fonts and imagery.

Too complex, too abstract

Simple logos are more memorable as they allow for easier recognition; however, for a logo to be memorable and stand apart from the crowd, it must have something unique about it, without being too overdrawn. Not only does simplicity make a logo more memorable, but it also makes the logo more versatile, meaning it can work over more mediums. For example, a logo should work on something the size of a postage stamp and on something as large as a billboard. Don't make your logo too abstract either.

Relying on special effects or color

If a logo requires color or special effects to make it a strong logo, it's not a strong logo. To get around this, work in black and white first and then add the special effects or color later. This allows you to focus on the shape and concept rather than the special effects. Don't use drop shadows, embossing, or other layer styles to gloss up logos—a good logo will stand on its own.

Using raster images

A logo should be designed in a vector graphics program such as Adobe Illustrator to ensure that the final logo can be scaled to any size, enabling the logo to be applied easily to other media. A vector graphic is made up of mathematically precise points, which ensures visual consistency across all mediums and sizes. A raster image (made out of pixels, such as what you would find in Photoshop) can't be scaled to any size, which means at large sizes, the logo would be unusable.



Take note how this logo uses just one font family but with different styling. The italic letterforms convey speed while the bold emphasizes the ease of the service.



All fonts have their own personality, so you should choose the right "font personality" for the job at hand. The font chosen in this logo is much more serious than, say, a hand-drawn font, which would convey very different attributes.



Although this logo has gradients and color, if we took away these effects it still has a strong form and concept.

Settling for a monogram

One of the more common mistakes of the amateur logo designer is trying to create a monogram out of the business' initials (e.g., Bob's Hardware would become a logo made out of B and H). Although this sounds like a smart solution at first, it's rather difficult to build credibility or convey an intended message with just the initials of a company. You can certainly explore this route, but don't settle on it unless you can create an original, creative, and memorable solution that reflects the business' goals.

Also, try not to shorten a business name into acronyms until it has been around for a while. HP, FedEx, IBM, and GM never started out as acronyms—they became this way after many years of high-profile exposure.

Using visual clichés

Light bulbs for creativity, speech bubbles for discussion, lightning strikes for electricity, swooshes for dynamism, etc. These

ideas are often the first things to pop into one's head when brainstorming, and for the same reason should be the first ideas discarded. How is your design going to be unique when so many other logos feature the same idea? Stay clear of these visual clichés and come up with an original idea and design.

Copying, stealing, or borrowing design

It's sad that this has to be said, but it's an all-too-common practice these days. A designer sees an idea that he likes, does a quick mirror, color swap, or word change, and then calls the idea his own. Not only is this unethical, illegal, and downright stupid but you're also going to get caught sooner or later. Do not use stock or clip art either—the point of a logo is to be unique and original.

Getting too much client input

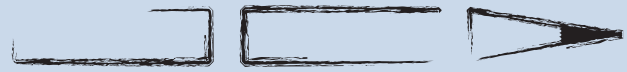
A client is paying you as a professional designer to come up with a relevant design, so you should direct the client to the best possible solution. The best way to do this is to offer your expertise, not by letting them direct the project (entirely). If a client asks for a misinformed change, explain why it may not be such a good idea and offer a better alternative. If they still refuse, try sending your own design decisions as well as their design suggestions. They will often realize that their suggestions may not have been the best; however, you as a designer should also realize that you're not *always* right, so try giving the client's suggestions a go—who knows where it will lead.

Providing too many concepts

Loosely linked to the above point is providing the client with too many options. This again means the client will have too much say over the design direction of the project. If you provide 10 concepts to a client, more often than not they will choose what you consider the worst design. A good rule of thumb is to only send one to three concepts that you personally could see working for their business. Of course, the number of concepts you send can change from project to project, but once you feel confident enough as a designer, these one to three concepts should nail the project on the head every time.

Not cleaning up logo files

Logo files should be one of the cleanest files you ever deliver a client. Node points should be kept to a minimum; curves should be as smooth as possible and without overlap. Shapes should be combined, and if your logo is symmetrical, it should be *perfectly* symmetrical. Everything about the delivered file should be perfect and as minimal as possible. Imagine if the client needs to blow up the logo to put on the side of a truck. If the logo has any mistakes, these will now be clearly visible. Make it perfect.



JUST CREATIVE DESIGN

A pencil on its own would be a visual cliché for any illustrator or designer; however, if you use a cliché in a creative and unique way, then your logo will be much more memorable. Have a look for the hidden J, C, and D in the logo shown here.



Take note of the wave hidden in this logo design. As an example of cleaning up files, this wave would have to be knocked out of the letters "W" and "A" rather than simply having a white wave shape sitting on top of the letterforms.

Not delivering correct files to client

Delivering the right files to your client is one way to ensure that your client never comes back asking for revisions or different versions of a logo. It also ensures that the logo gets displayed correctly in all circumstances, which should be supported by a style guide.

You should give your client four high-quality files *per logo variation*—this means providing a spot-color file, a pure CMYK (no spot colors), a pure black file, and a pure white (knockout) file. These should generally be in EPS, TIFF, and JPEG formats. You can provide a favicon too, if you're feeling nice.

Hopefully, these ideas will help you build better logos and deliver happier clients. It's important, however, to state that although lists such as this are a good starting point, they should not hold you back—rules are made to be broken. ■■

